

James Cameron's Avatar: The Way Of Water is a cry for help on behalf of the ocean

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SINGAPORE – Avatar: The Way Of Water melds two of Canadian film-maker James Cameron's favourite topics: the stewardship of nature and technology.

The 68-year-old is a bundle of contradictions.

He is widely revered, but over a career spanning four decades, he has directed only 10 feature films. Two of them, Avatar (2009) and Titanic (1997), are ranked No. 1 and 3 respectively in all-time global box-office takings, with combined grosses of US\$5 billion (S\$6.8 billion).

He is a stickler for realism, putting actors through gruelling retakes of scenes involving tough physical action, but nearly every section of the forest scenes in the first Avatar film was digitally rendered.

The ocean segments in the new film were also created on a computer, but Cameron still required that the actors learn to freedive.

Performance-capture technology was used. It is a system that tracks the actor's body and converts the movement into data that can be used to recreate it digitally. He used a motion-capture method he developed himself for the first movie, but adapted it for underwater filming.

The first movie showed Pandora's natives, the Na'vi, defending their forest home against a militarised mining company from Earth.

Cameron, however, is better known as an advocate of ocean exploration and protection. He hopes the spell he cast in the first film will entrance viewers of the sequels.

“A film like this can remind people of the deep, unconscious, almost dream-like connection we human beings have with the ocean,” he says.

Speaking at a virtual press conference, he says that what audiences see in the new film used to exist here on Earth.

“Two hundred years ago, our oceans had the profusion of biodiversity and biomass that we see in this movie. We need to stop the exploitation of the ocean at the scale that we have been doing, to preserve this beautiful and wondrous diversity of life that we have in our oceans,” he says.

“This film is a cry for help on behalf of the ocean.”